Department of Music
University of Alberta

HELMUT BRAUSS

ALL MOZART PIANO RECITAL
on Mozart's Birthday:

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Convocation Hall, Arts Building
University of Alberta

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PRESS Release

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It is an interesting phenomenon, that Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's works for solo piano have all but disappeared from the conventional programming of piano recitals. One might speculate as to possible reasons for such neglect and find, that the ritualistic show-off character of recital programs in our days does not allow for the necessary intimacy, those precious works demand, since they are by definition more "Hausmusik" than virtuosic show pieces. Thus the only works with piano, still clinging on to the concert repertoire are a few of the more well known piano concertos and one or two chamber music works.

Taking into account the wealth of imaginative music in Mozart's oeuvre for solo piano, which is in no way inferior to popular Symphonies or Operas, one should consider recultivating this repertoire, which encompasses the whole range from naive intimacy to glittering brillancy. The commemorative Mozart Year 1991 seems to be a welcome occasion to pay respect to Mozart as a composer of sonatas, variations, fantasies and other pieces for solo piano.

The question might be asked, whether it is meaningful in our historizing age to play on our modern concert grand music, that was performed in Mozart's time on a quite different, lighter, instrument with a much thinner and transparent sound spectrum. Presently a lot of sometimes very vociferous discussion is generated by the various representatives of the "period instrument" movement claiming, that only "authentic" performances are valid in our time. While the term authentic might be questionable in this context, stylistic aspects always have to be an important concern for the interpreter of historic music. However, the outright dismissal of our modern concert grand as a possible vehicle to convey the beauty and truth of Mozart's music in general can only be considered narrow minded and in some ways illogical.
The human voice for instance, which is the core of the belcanto in Mozart's operas, is still the same high quality instrument today, it was then, while the piano in Mozart's time could never produce the same singing tone, a modern Steinway or Bösendorfer is able to convey today. The same might be said of the wide array of possibilities with respect to sound spectra, our modern piano offers, that are certainly closer to the orchestral sound of Mozart's time, than to his piano. The beauty of Mozart's music is indivisibly the same, whether found in his operas or in his piano works. Let us thus familiarize ourselves through our historic research with the stylistic characteristics of Mozart's music and use the best instruments, that allow us to convey this beauty "from heart to heart".

(HB)

HELMUT BRAUSS (pianist)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756-1791)

Program

Fantasy K. 396 c-minor (1782)

Eight Variations K.460 A-major (1784)
on "come un'agnello" by Sarti

Sonata K. 333 B-flat major (1778)

Allegro
Andante cantabile
Allegretto grazioso

INTERMISSION

Sonata K.281 B-flat major (1774)

Allegro
Andante amoroso
RONDEAU - Allegro

Sonata K. 576 D-major (1789)

Allegro
Adagio
Allegretto

PROGRAM NOTES

The program of this recital encompasses early and late Sonatas as well one sample of Mozart's many Variation works and the lesser known Fantasy K.396 in c-minor. The latter piece stands at the beginning. It proves to be an interesting curiosum, since neither the title, nor the whole middle section or the recapitulation are by Mozart, but added by his friend, Abbé Maximilian Stadler, who finished the work in such a congenial way, that one is not really tempted to question the originality of Mozart's language.

The Variations K.460 in A-major are very seldom performed, although they belong to Mozart's best works in this genre. The composer expands his own conventional scheme considerably by inserting an extensive allegro section with new thematic material, before returning via a free cadenza to the original theme in two slow Variations and concluding with a brillant final variation.

The three Sonatas represent the "brillant", the "intimate" and the "intricate" species. The B-flat major Sonata K.333 is an extended work in three contrasting movements, the last of which follows somewhat the formal principles of a Rondo in a piano concerto movement and incorporates a virtuosic, integrated cadenza towards the end. Permeated by brillant passage work, this sonata is one of the most effective in this genre.

The "small" B-flat Sonata K.281 in B-flat major is a lovely specimen of "Hausmusik", a beautiful, unpretentious gem, in which brillancy and intimacy are well balanced. The last movement, a lively Rondeau, excels in those humorous or even witty statements, that are quite representative of the innate charme, so characteristic for the playful Rococo.

The final work on the program is Mozart's last piano sonata K.576 in D-major and also his most mature work filled with intricate counterpuntal structures and formally as concise as the material would allow. Although not of symphonic proportions, its compositional procedures show many similarities to those found in the famous Jupiter Symphony. The slow movement with its consoling f-sharp minor section already points to the heavenly expression we find in Mozart's late works, like for example the quintet for clarinet and strings. The balance of content and form is unsurpassed and the understatement at the end of this sonata is symptomatic for the truth, that Mozart's beauty does not need to be emphasized - it lives by itself.

(HB)